don't need any in mine, and I reckon I oughter be glad on't."

Having delivered himself to this effect he glanced quickly at Cynthia again and relapsed into silence. Amelia helped herself gravely to the contents of the tumbler, with the remark that she hated to see "sech good whisky lef' like dat clean out 'n de cold," and then departed abruptly for the kitchen. Cynthia raised her beautiful eyes to Jerrold and thanked him for his reflections with a smile so sweet and engaging that Bruce, wet as he was, set down his half filled glass upon the mantel shelf as quietly as possible. Then a silence fell upon the little group—perhaps induced by the drowsy warmth and that tendency to reverie promoted by a blazing fire. The snoring of the dogs fast asleep upon the hearthstone was heard distinctly in the stillness.

These reflections were broken in upon a few minutes later by Amelia, who emerged from the kitchen carrying a big dish of fried catfish and a steaming coffeepot, which she placed at the head of the table.

"Cynthy," said the old man, taking his seat at the festive board without further ceremony, "tell Ameelyer to hurry up with them flapjacks and potatoes. I'm nigh starved! Set down, boys, and don't be hankerin after victuals thet's jes' gittin cold afore yer eyes. Cynthy, you pour the coffee, and I'll rastle with the fish."

With this homely introduction he at once attacked the viands. The rest of the company cheerfully followed suit.

Later, when the appetite of the voracious Alcides Dallas had succumbed to the abundant supply of catfish and flapjacks, they all returned to the fire and seated themselves variously about the blazing hearth. After a long interval of gazing at the incandescent coals the old man delivered himself sententiously to this effect:

"It bein a leetle chilly here this evenin"—in a low, confidential tone, as if in confidence to the glowing embers—"it bein a leetle chilly tonight, I allow thet ef I axed Ameelyer to make a good pitcher o' eggnog it might help matters and obligate the mists of adversity and depression to not so monotonously prevail—that is, if them durned hens hev concluded to lay at all lately. Ye see, we've made a beginnin on thet rye whisky," he added, by way of apology. "Ameelyer, wot account hev ye got to give of them perticklerhens?"

Amelia, who was busily engaged clearing away the remnants of the recent supper, paused at the table in the act of scraping a dish.

"Bless yo' soul, boss, de hens am all reg'lar! I've done got five eggs a day ever sence I fed 'em thet raw meat."

"I wanter know!" said the old man in gratified surprise, without removing his eyes from the hearth. "Waal, then, you might beat up about a dozen o' them eggs in a pitcher and empty the rest o' thet jug on 'em to keep 'em from spilin. I'm anxious not to get them pains ag'in. P'raps it won't do to keep my supper waitin too long for it."

"De Lor!" exclaimed Amelia, rolling her eyes in amazement, "yo' doan' wan' de hole jug o' whisky in dem eggs, boss! Do yo' wan' cook 'em into one paste same as an om'let? One teaspoonful to ebery egg, sah—dat am de correc' proportion."

"Waal, let her go at thet, then!" sighed the old man querulously, "so long ez you don't give thet centypede time to get to work on my inside afore yer on hand with it."

Amelia disappeared in the kitchen forthwith and soon returned with the coveted beverage in an earthen pitcher. The glasses were filled and set round.

"Thet's a right peart shootin iron o' your'n, Mr. Bruce!" said the old man, picking up the latter's breechloader as it stood in a corner of the hearthstone and curiously examining it.

"Jeewhittaker! It works like a rifle, don't it? Waal, now, that lays way over the 'Silent Mary,' Buck, you bet. Cynthy, bring 'Mary' out! She's standin in the corner. I loaded her today, darter,' he added in a low tone of voice as if thinking aloud, "with a handful o' salt in case that blasted Capting Foraker comes callin on ye ag'in durin the next fortnight. I hain't no other use for him, and I reckon he knows it!"

Cynthia made no reply to this remark of Alcides, but soon returned to the hearth carrying with difficulty an enormous muzzle loading shotgun. It was double barreled and evidently designed for killing geese at long range.

"I call her the 'Silent Mary,'" said the old man, setting the unwieldy weapon between his knees and regarding it admirably, "out of a feelin of gentle sarcasm. She's about the loudest in argyment of any shootin iron I ever see. And what she hez to say generally strikes home—sometimes both ways. I reckoned the drum of my ear one time was plumb busted! But lookin at her by and large," he added, tapping the barrel and surveying the great gun, "'Mary' liez more p'ints and more 'git thar' than anythin I ever yet p'inted into a flock o' geese or wild duck."

He turned his head slowly and regarded Bruce.

"I dare say," the latter replied considerately, "you can count on that gun for very long range, but I find mine convenient for ordinary shooting. Won't you try a cigar?"

He opened a leather cigar case and held it toward him. The old man took one as a matter of course, but pursued his reflections. Bruce extended the case to Jerrold, and then lighting one himself blew a cloud into the open fireplace.

"I don't allow thet you'll believe me," said old Dallas, biting off the whole lower end of the weed before fitting it carefully between his scant teeth, "but I hev killed geese with 'Mary' ez far as 150 yards. I'd like to git a 'bead' with her on them fellers ez stole Old Spike and them running hogs o' our'n, Buck," he broke out suddenly.

Mr. Buck Jerrold assented grimly, laying a significant hand on a revolver he wore in his belt and tilting his cigar in his mouth reflectively.

"Are you meeting with any loss in that way?" inquired Bruce, quietly glancing at both. "I've had a little trouble of that kind myself lately."

"Ya-as," drawled the old man, "there's allus suthin goin wrong with yer live stock. Ef it ain't cows it's hosses, and ef it ain't hosses it's hogs. Them black and white hogs o' mine are runnin free to be sure, but theyv'e good a good road brand, and there ain't no excuse for huntin 'em. But they's pork with my brand fur sale down at San Marcus all the same. I reckon it's Lem Wickson and his gang. I've sent word to the sheriff, and he'll be over here some day to talk it over. I perpose to hev the law on 'em.

"Dadburn the luck!" he broke out suddenly as recent disasters increased his impatience. "There's them fine wooled Vermont bucks out in the pen. One on 'em didn't come to time yesterday at sundown. Found him lyin stiff and cold in the mornin—pizened on laurel, I reckon! It's enough to gravel the patience of Job, durned ef it ain't!"

He leaned back in his chair and took a long, consolatory sip of the eggnog in his tumbler with evident zest. All at once the air without was filled with cries, as if all bedlam were let loose—shrieks, barks and yells that, from their number and frequency, might have proceeded from 50 throats.

"There they go, them durned coyotes!" ejaculated the old man, turning to listen. "I reckon they're wranglin over the carcass o' thet poor old buck. I never hear one o' them devils tune up," he continued slowly, "but wot I think o' my wife ez was onct an how she could 'hold the fort' ef any one give her a reasonable opportunity. I'd back her ag'in anythin I ever seen yet. Thar was times in my fam'ly," he added, sinking his voice almost to a whisper, "when I fust come to Texas an started in the hotel business, an the frontier not, so to speak, exactly jibin with Marier's eccentricities—thar was times in my family when nothin short of a menagerie at feedin time could ekel it. I useter sit by them times tryin to console myself with the idea thet I hed the biggest domestic circus in the Lone Star country. Thar wan't much comfort in thet somehow. But I'm here yet," he concluded triumphantly. "Marier ain't, though," he added after a pause.

"Is your wife dead, sir?" inquired Bruce, with all the gravity he could assume. Cynthia glanced up at him with a pained look.

"Don't git Al started on married life—don't, natch'ally!" interposed Jerrold hastily, with a warning gesture.

But the train was already fired.

"Dead!" exclaimed Alcides Dallas, "thet's wot I'd like to know. Mattermony," he remarked, deliberately stretching out his cramped legs, burying his hands deep in the pockets of his ducking trousers and gazing dejectedly before him with bent head as if consulting an unhallowed past, "mattermony is a lottery, my friend, whar thar's more blanks than prizes, and, understand me, I'm capable o' jedgin, fur I lived with Marier nigh onto 10 years, and hevin graduated—not with high honors, but all the same havin graduated—I'm tol'ble well up on the subjec'.

"It's jes' ez I say to Cynthy here. She's a good little girl, though, and don't gin'rally give me any trouble on thet score—not to say thet I wouldn't be glad to see Cynthy hitched in double harness, purvided her pardner was an honest sort o' hoss, warranted sound and kind and not likely to kick in the traces. But thar's allus thet risk, and nothin's more uncertain than marryin, I allow, unless it be swappin hosses. My old granny useter say to my sisters—and God knows why I didn't profit by it, I heard it all my life—'Gals, don't be in a hurry, fur ef you git a good husband you'll be well paid fur waitin, and ef you make a mistake you'll hev plenty long enough to live with him.' I kin only repeat the same thing to Cynthy and hope she'll hev more sense than I hed on the subjec'. Still Cynthy knows wot I think a'ready."

He paused and glanced significantly at Mr. Buck Jerrold, who pulled his hat brim over his eyes, as if to shade them from the glare of the fire. Cynthia moved uneasily in her corner, blushed crimson and stole a glance at Bruce from under her drooping lashes.

The old man drained his tumbler to the dregs, set it down on the table with emphasis and proceeded:

"Still, all this ain't nuther here nor there. I kem to Texas arter the war from Caroliny. Marier and I hed got along pretty well back in the States; fit occasionally, ye know, but thet's expected arter the fust two years. Things was flat in Caroliny. I 'lowed to git out whar the kentry was new; sold out, tuck Cynthy—she was only a baby then—and Marier—I might better hev left her, but I didn't know enough—and kem to Texas and started into the hotel business. I done well 'nuff at fust and made money. My house was full all the while of sheep and cattlemen—good pay and plenty of it.

"But bimeby, arter the novelty wore off, Marier allowed thet the kentry didn't quite kem up to her expectations and begun takin an inventory of the guests stoppin at the house ter alleviate her grief at the fact. The fust feller thet she seemed to find kalkerlated to overcome the monotony of the frontier was this here Capting Foraker I loaded 'Mary' fur this arternoon. She met him at a 'barbecue' and run with him consid'rable fur a spell. Of course I had suthin to say on that subjec', and arter awhile this Foraker he quit callin. It might hev bin bekase I was right smart at makin warts on silver dollars throwed up in the air them days, but I don't discuss that subjec'. Then there was a sewin masheen agent who presented Marier with a masheen, and thereby savin Marier consid'rable sewin at nights give her an opportunity of showin her gratitude by playin the piany fur him onnecessarily in the parlor.

"About the same time my mendin began to be uncertain and permiskiss, and the fam'ly menagerie was on daily exhibition. The agent fin'ly went east, and Marier languished for awhile, but one day a julery drummer kem through—a slick chap, with plenty o' samples o' pinchbeck and gewgaws. Her spirits rose ag'in and never faltered from thet time forward. They rose so high this time thet she left town with thet feller one night, and I ain't laid eyes on her sence. Marier never done things by halves, and I never could quite onderstand why it was she left Cynthy here behind, but it was a fortunate thing for me she did, or I reckon I'd setted my account with a 6-shooter during the next fortnight. Not but wot I'd been willin to settle hers fust, though," he added significantly.

"I'd preferred to have left this world with sunthin to my credit. Arter that I quit the hotel bizness and kem here. I lent money on live stock and did pretty well. Buck here and me own right smart o' cattle together, and he looks arter 'em, bein foreman o' Judge Reynolds' ranch and sprier and younger. I ain't heard of Mrs. Dallas sence, and now I don't wanter.

"It's gettin late," he said abruptly, "and I reckon we'd better make down."

He rose with a yawn and an impatient kick at the dying embers. Cynthia rose, too, and calling the dogs put them out of doors for the night, after which she dropped the gentlemen a quaint courtesy and retired to her bedroom.

The old man went to a closet, from which he took three gray blankets and threw them down on the floor. "One apiece," he said with primitive hospitality, drawing off his boots and wrapping his ducking coat around them to serve for a pillow. He rolled himself in his blanket, his feet toward the fire, and was soon asleep and snoring loudly. Nothing was left but for Bruce and Jerrold to follow suit. This they accordingly did.

But toward morning they were aroused by Alcides rising impatiently and stumping noisily to the door. A few minutes elapsed and there was a fearful explosion, the bare room lighting up with the red flash. Bruce sat up at once, rubbing his sleepy eyes and inquiring the cause of the disturbance. Even in his confused alarm he heard Cynthia laughing to herself in her little bedroom.

"It's nothin but cows," said Mr. Buck Jerrold, turning over with a yawn in his blanket. "The old man left a pair of good breeches out on the fence to dry this evenin, and I reckon them salt starved cattle hev been chawin onto 'em in the course o' their pryin round. He's seen fit to turn loose onto them the load which he said he give 'Mary' this arternoon on account o' Foraker. It's a way of saltin 'em that's quite pop'lar here at the ranch."

CHAPTER IV.

Dawn came, lacing with rose and amber the severing east. With the first rays of light the cries of wild geese were heard flying in long harrow toward the river, and also the faint clang of mallard and shelldrake passing overhead. These sounds awoke Bruce, who rose cramped and stiff and leaned against the chimneypiece in lazy admiration of the pageantry of early morning seen through the shutterless windows of the ranch.

He glanced down at the tumbled heap of blankets at his feet. Only one of his companion bedfellows met his eye. Mr. Buck Jerrold had already arisen, leaving his disordered enwrappings in a tangled coil, very much as a snake casts its skin. The old man, his hands folded upon his breast, lay flat upon his back, snoring dismally.

Bruce regarded him a moment with an amused smile, and then true to the sportsman's instinct drew on his shooting jacket, caught up his gun from the corner of the hearth and stepped out into the cool, clear air.

As he did so he beheld Mr. Buck Jerrold saddling his roan cow pony and evidently making preparations for an early departure.

"Where away at this hour of the morning?" he inquired, sauntering up.

"Back to the ranch. I've got more'n 50 young lambs to look after, I reckon."

"You're not going off before breakfast?" Bruce inquired, leaning on the gate.

"I reckon so. I don't call 10 miles afore breakfast any great shakes."

"That depends on the rider," Bruce replied pleasantly. "I don't think any one could hire me to ride 10 miles this morning without a cup of coffee at least. I feel as lame and stiff as if I'd been dragged at the end of a lariat through a thick chaparral."

"Oh, I've hed my coffee, you can bet yer life!" Jerrold replied. "Amelia's up already; she ain't the woman to let a man start out without suthin under his jacket. I say, pardner, ef you're in any great hurry to get back to the Mesquite valley, bein ez you're turned foot loose and without a nag to ride on, ye can hev Buckshot here fer $25," indicating his roan. "He ain't handsome, but he's good for twice thet distance, ez smart ez ye want to june him. He's fast and sure footed both and don't buck nuther. Ye needn't keep yer friends waitin and anxious. I kin rope one o' the old man's 'kaveyard' and get off easy with half an hour's delay."

He paused, bringing the much lauded Buckshot smartly around by a blow of his quirt as he did so, at the same time stooping and tightening the flank girth.

Buckshot, a large, raw boned, spotted horse with vicious eyes and Roman nose, laid his ears back in protest; then he sprang clear of the ground with back arched like a cat and rigid legs, striking the earth at every bound, as if there were no such property known to matter as elasticity. He varied this unique performance at intervals by a plunging movement fore and aft, like a stout ship in a heavy sea. The result was soon obvious. Amid a whirling vortex of blinding dust and flying hoofs the saddle began to turn. When Buckshot suspended his exertions a few minutes later and struck a snorting and indignant tablean with fiery eyes and flaring nostrils the saddle was upside down and hanging loosely between his four feet.

"No!" said Bruce quietly, vaulting lightly over the fence, after witnessing this interesting performance. "I see now plainly that Buckshot does not buck. He is only a little opposed to your 'cinching' the flankgirth. But I think I shall get along here very well, Mr. Jerrold, until my partner, Phil Kernochan, looks me up or something favorable happens. He knew that my general direction was the Colorado river, and that I was out after turkeys. Meanwhile the hunting is good, and I think I'll shoot a brace of mallards before the family is stirring. Adios! Drop in and see us the next time you're over our way. There they come now!" he exclaimed, shoving a couple of shells into his gun, as he marked a small flock of duck coming down the wind. "Adios!"

[CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.]

AN INTERESTING WOMAN.

The Brilliant Society Editor of a Cincinnati Paper.

Mrs. C. A. R. Devereux, the brilliant society editor of the Cincinnati Commercial Gazette, lives on West Fourth street, where, until recently, when three weddings of her children followed in quick succession, she was surrounded by an interesting family. Only wee, dainty Marion, who is yet a bud, remains in this home of refinement.

MRS. C. A. R. DEVEREUX.

Born in Boston, brought up in an atmosphere of culture, invited to read at morning symposiums papers that found their way into print, it is hard to say when Mrs. Devereux first began to write for the newspapers. But the first real work, about five years after her marriage to General Devereux in the seventies, was for the Boston Advertiser. Her next work was for The Courier of that city.

It has been only a few years since women begun to be appreciated as journalists, and on the removal of General Devereux to Cincinnati in 1876 she began to write feature articles for The Gazette, using the nom de plume of Clare de Vere, and for The Commercial, where her initials, D'Arc, reversed, were used. Soon after her advent in Cincinnati journalism she was given the art assignments and then society work. The Sunday paper had grown, and with it the society column, and on the consolidation of The Commercial Gazette Mrs. Devereux was made society editor, and she enjoys the distinction of being the first woman employed in any capacity on the Cincinnati papers. To define in what particular Mrs. Devereux attracts you is an impossibility, but as you enter her door something in the sincere hospitable greeting makes you feel you are really welcome to this retreat, with its quaint furnishings, all in such artistic confusion.

In appearance Mrs. Devereux is of medium height, rather stout, but her carriage is so dignified it gives you the impression she is quite tall. The expression of her face is forceful, and in her profile the angle of intellect is clearly defined. She is bright and witty in conversation, is well versed in all branches of newspaper work and wields a ready, trenchant pen. Mrs. Devereux is a fine linguist. Her fads? Ah, yes, women all have fads nowadays, but to see her in her home one need not ask that question. It is one any woman ought to be proud to own—her home and the comforts of her family.

MARIE E. ISLER.

The Old Masters.

Art Patron—Only 300 francs for a genuine Rembrandt, and so well preserved, too, that it is really very cheap. What does the picture represent?

Broker—Can't you see? The battle of Sedan, per Bacco!—Mondo Umoristico.

A False Charge.

Magistrate—What is the charge?

Officer—Carrying concealed deadly weapons.

Prisoner—'Tis false, your honor. I had no deadly weapon. It was only a French dueling pistol.—New York Weekly.

An Indulgent Husband.

Bachelor—No more sewing on of suspender buttons now, old boy, eh?

Benedict—No, I wear a belt now. I've got no time to sew on buttons. Keeps me hustling to buy bread and butter.—Texas Siftings.